

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee  
on National Security, Emerging Threats  
and International Relations, Committee  
on Government Reform, House of  
Representatives

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July 2006

# SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

## Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be Addressed to Meet Expanded Role



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## Why GAO Did This Study

Since the Global War on Terrorism, the Department of Defense (DOD) has taken steps to expand the role of the United States Special Operations Command (Command) and its forces. In response, the Command has transformed its headquarters to coordinate counterterrorism activities, and DOD has increased funding and the number of special operations forces positions. Given the expanded mission, it is critical that the Command has personnel with the right knowledge and skill sets. GAO was asked to assess: (1) whether the Command has determined all of the personnel requirements needed to meet its expanded role; (2) the progress and challenges in meeting growth goals; and (3) any effect of deployments on the Command's ability to provide trained forces, and the progress made in managing deployments. GAO performed its work at the Special Operations Command and its service components, analyzed personnel data against requirements, and examined policies and directives.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to improve the information available to the Special Operations Command to manage special operations forces personnel.

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD concurred or partially concurred with GAO's recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-812](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-812).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or [pickups@gao.gov](mailto:pickups@gao.gov).

July 2006

# SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

## Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be Addressed to Meet Expanded Role

### What GAO Found

Although DOD plans to significantly increase the number of special operations forces personnel, the Special Operations Command has not yet fully determined all of the personnel requirements needed to meet its expanded mission. While it has determined the number of personnel needed to increase its number of warfighter units, it has not completed analyses to determine (a) how many headquarters staff are needed to train and equip these additional warfighters or (b) how many headquarters staff are needed to plan and synchronize global actions against terrorist networks—a new mission for the Command. DOD plans to begin increasing the number of headquarters positions and has requested funds for these positions in its fiscal year 2007 budget request. Until these analyses are completed, the Special Operations Command cannot provide assurances to the Secretary of Defense and the Congress that currently planned growth in the number of personnel for the Command's headquarters will meet, exceed, or fall short of the requirements needed to address the Command's expanded mission.

The military services and the Special Operations Command have made progress since fiscal year 2000 in recruiting, training, and retaining special operations forces personnel, but they must overcome persistently low personnel inventory levels and insufficient numbers of newly trained personnel, in certain specialties, to meet DOD's plan to increase the number of special operations forces. In addition, GAO's review of the service components' annual reports required by the Special Operations Command shows that the reports have not provided the information needed to determine whether they have enough personnel to meet current and future requirements. Without such information, the Command will be unable to determine whether the service components' human capital management approaches, including recruiting, training, and retention strategies, will be effective in meeting the planned growth targets.

Since fiscal year 2000, the number of special operations forces personnel deployed for operations has greatly increased, and the number deployed for training has simultaneously decreased. The Special Operations Command has taken action to manage the challenge of increased deployments; in August 2005, it began requiring active duty personnel to remain at least an equal amount of time at home as deployed. But the Command's service components have not consistently or fully implemented this policy. This is because the policy lacks clear guidance on the length of time that the components must ensure that personnel remain within the deployment policy guidelines. In addition, officials with the Command's Army and Navy service components expressed concerns regarding the reliability of their information required to track the deployments of their personnel. Without consistent and reliable data, the Special Operations Command does not have the information it needs to effectively manage the personnel deployments of special operations forces, which affects its ability to maintain the readiness, retention, and training of these personnel.

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**United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548**

July 31, 2006

The Honorable Christopher Shays  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats  
and International Relations  
Committee on Government Reform  
House of Representatives

The Department of Defense (DOD) established the United States Special Operations Command (Command) in 1987 with the primary purpose to train and equip special operations forces and provide these forces to the department's geographic combatant commands.<sup>1</sup> Since 2003, DOD has taken several steps to expand the role of the Special Operations Command to lead the department's efforts in the Global War on Terrorism.

Specifically, the Command has been given the responsibility for planning and synchronizing DOD activities in support of this war. To meet this expanded mission, the Command has transformed its headquarters to improve the coordination of counterterrorism activities, and DOD has increased the number of military positions for special operations forces personnel by 12 percent since fiscal year 2001. Moreover, the February 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report states that the department intends to further increase these forces through fiscal year 2011.<sup>2</sup> At DOD's request, the Congress has provided the Special Operations Command with considerable increases in funding to support its expanded mission and increase the size of its forces. Specifically, from fiscal year 2001 through fiscal year 2005, funding for the Command increased from more than \$3.8 billion to more than \$6.4 billion.

Special operations forces differ from conventional forces in that they are specially organized, trained, and equipped to conduct operations in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments. These operations are intended to achieve military, diplomatic, informational, or economic objectives by employing military capabilities for which there is no

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<sup>1</sup> The five geographic combatant commands—U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Pacific Command, and U.S. Southern Command—are responsible for U.S. military operations within their areas.

<sup>2</sup> DOD, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (February 2006).

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conventional force requirement, and they often require covert, clandestine, or low-visibility capabilities. Each of the military services provides special operations forces to the Special Operations Command, and thus the military services and the Special Operations Command have a shared responsibility to ensure that a sufficient number of special operations forces personnel are available. For example, the military services recruit new candidates for special operations training, while, in general, the Special Operations Command provides the combat specialty training for these forces.

Since the onset of the Global War on Terrorism, DOD has deployed substantial numbers of special operations forces to conduct a range of military operations. These forces have conducted combat missions in Afghanistan and Iraq and, in addition, have helped train indigenous military personnel in these countries and in other parts of the world, including countries in Asia and Africa, to build the capabilities of partner nations to combat terrorists more effectively within their own countries. Several documents published by DOD, including the National Defense Strategy and the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism,<sup>3</sup> emphasize the capabilities provided by special operations forces. As a result, the increased pace of deployments for these forces is likely to continue in the near term. Recently, the Special Operations Command has taken steps to manage the impact of deployments, which has included establishing policy guidelines for the frequency of personnel deployments.

This report responds to your request and addresses the following questions: (1) the extent to which the Special Operations Command has determined personnel requirements needed to meet its expanded mission; (2) what progress the military services and the Special Operations Command have made since fiscal year 2000 in recruiting, training, and retaining special operations forces personnel, and what challenges they face to meet future growth; and (3) the effect that deployments since fiscal year 2000 have had on the Special Operations Command's ability to provide an adequate number of trained forces for the full range of its worldwide missions, and what progress the Command has made in managing personnel deployments.

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<sup>3</sup> See DOD, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (March 2005), and DOD, *The National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* (February 2006).

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To assess the extent to which the Special Operations Command has identified all of the personnel requirements needed to meet its expanded mission, we reviewed documents and interviewed officials involved with determining personnel requirements with the Special Operations Command, and with the Army, Navy, and Air Force service components. We also met with Marine Corps officials to discuss plans for growth in Marine Corps special operations forces. We analyzed the plans for growth in these personnel through fiscal year 2011. To assess the progress the military services and the Special Operations Command have made since fiscal year 2000 in increasing the number of special operations forces personnel, we discussed the processes used by the Army, Navy, and Air Force to recruit, train, and retain these forces with officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Special Operations Command, and the military services. We focused on these processes for the active components of the military services. To determine what challenges the military services and the Special Operations Command face to meet future growth, we analyzed personnel inventory levels for special operations forces in the active component military services for fiscal years 2000 through 2005, and we collected and analyzed data from the schools that train new special operations forces personnel. In addition, we reviewed relevant Special Operations Command directives and analyzed the annual reports prepared by the service components to determine the extent to which the information in these reports met reporting requirements. To assess the effect of increased special operations forces deployments, we analyzed the trends in the deployment of special operations forces for fiscal years 2000 through 2005, and we discussed the impact of deployments with officials from the Special Operations Command and the military services. We reviewed available data for inconsistencies and discussed the data with DOD officials. Our assessments of data reliability revealed some concerns that are discussed in this report; however, we concluded the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes. We conducted our review from April 2005 through June 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. A more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology is contained in appendix I.

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## Results in Brief

The Special Operations Command has not yet fully determined all of the personnel requirements needed to meet its expanded mission. While the Command has determined how many special operations forces personnel it needs to meet increases in its warfighter units, it has not completed analyses to determine (a) the number of headquarters staff needed to train and equip these additional warfighters or (b) the number of headquarters staff needed to plan and synchronize global actions against terrorist

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networks. Nevertheless, the department has already made the decision to increase the number of positions for the Command's headquarters, beginning with the fiscal year 2007 budget request, by more than 75 percent. However, this increase is not based on a comprehensive analysis of personnel requirements, given that the Command's analyses were ongoing at the time of our review. We have previously reported that strategic workforce planning is essential in that it aligns an organization's human capital program with its current and emerging mission.<sup>4</sup> Until these analyses are completed, the Special Operations Command cannot provide assurances to the Secretary of Defense and the Congress that currently planned growth in the number of personnel for the Command's headquarters will meet, exceed, or fall short of the requirements needed to address the Command's expanded mission. To address this challenge, GAO is recommending that the Special Operations Command establish specific milestones for completing its ongoing analyses of personnel requirements and, once completed, make any needed adjustments to the current plans for personnel increases for the Command's headquarters and related future funding requests.

The military services and the Special Operations Command have made progress from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005 in recruiting, training, and retaining special operations forces personnel; however, the military services and the Special Operations Command must overcome persistently low personnel inventory levels and insufficient numbers of newly trained special operations forces personnel for some specialties to meet DOD's plan to increase the number of special operations forces. In addition, the Special Operations Command does not have complete information on the human capital challenges it is facing, including low personnel inventory levels and training limitations, and the planned corrective actions it needs to evaluate the success of its service components' human capital approaches in meeting their growth targets. The military services and the Special Operations Command have achieved progress by increasing recruiting goals, training greater numbers of new personnel, and using financial incentives to retain experienced personnel. However, the military services and the Command face several challenges in meeting future growth goals. For example, since fiscal year 2000, well over half of the special operations forces specialties have been underfilled each year, by an amount ranging from less than 5 percent to more than 86

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<sup>4</sup> GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, GAO-04-39 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 2003).

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percent. As a result, hundreds of authorized positions have been unfilled each year. Further, our analysis of data reported by the Army, Navy, and Air Force schools that train new special operations forces personnel shows the number of personnel who are graduating from these schools is insufficient in some cases to meet current authorized personnel levels or planned growth targets. The schools have been unable to graduate a sufficient number of new special operations forces personnel for several reasons, including recruiting an inadequate number of servicemembers who attended the schools each year. From fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, for example, the Naval Special Warfare Command did not produce a sufficient number of enlisted Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) personnel to meet authorized personnel levels or future growth targets. In addition, our review of the service components' annual reports required by the Special Operations Command shows that the reports do not provide information the Command needs to determine if the services have enough personnel to meet current and future requirements. Without this information, the Special Operations Command will be unable to evaluate whether the service components' human capital management approaches, including their recruiting, training, and retention strategies, will be effective in meeting the planned growth targets. To address this challenge, GAO is recommending that the Special Operations Command revise its directive for its program to monitor the status of special operations forces to include performance objectives, goals, and measures of progress for achieving planned growth, and enforce all of the directive's reporting requirements.

Since fiscal year 2000, special operations forces have experienced a substantial increase in the number of personnel deployed for operations and a simultaneous decrease in the number of personnel deployed for training. From fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, the average weekly number of special operations forces personnel who deployed to the geographic combatant commands increased by 64 percent, or about 3,100 personnel. The majority have been deployed for operations in the U.S. Central Command, which accounted for 85 percent of total overseas deployments in fiscal year 2005. Our analysis also shows that from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, special operations forces deployed less frequently for training. As a result of this decrease, special operations forces personnel participated in fewer types of training events, including

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theater engagement activities such as joint combined exchange training.<sup>5</sup> As we have previously reported, training overseas with foreign forces is important, as it enables special operations forces personnel to maintain language proficiency and familiarity with local geography and cultures.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, DOD documents regarding the department's strategy for the Global War on Terrorism identify combined training, such as joint combined exchange training, as an important element for strengthening partner nations' counterterrorism capabilities. To its credit, the Special Operations Command has taken action to manage the challenge of increased deployments. In August 2005, the Command established a policy that requires active duty personnel to remain at least an equal amount of time at home as deployed. However, the Command's service components have not consistently or fully implemented this policy. This is because the policy lacks clear guidance on the length of time that the components must ensure that personnel remain within the deployment policy guidelines. In addition, officials with the Command's Army and Navy service components expressed concerns regarding the reliability of information required to track the deployments of their personnel. Without consistent and reliable data, the Special Operations Command does not have the information it needs to effectively manage the personnel deployments of special operations forces, which affects the Command's ability to maintain the readiness, retention, and training of special operations forces personnel. To address this challenge, GAO is recommending that the Special Operations Command clarify the methodology that the Command's service components use for enforcing the deployment policy, and take steps to ensure that the service components have tracking systems in place that utilize reliable data to meet the requirements of the policy.

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD concurred or partially concurred with GAO's recommendations.

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<sup>5</sup> Joint combined exchange training is a program conducted overseas to fulfill U.S. forces training requirements and at the same time exchange the sharing of skills between U.S. forces and host nation counterparts. Training activities are designed to improve U.S. and host nation capabilities.

<sup>6</sup> GAO, *Military Training: Management and Oversight of Joint Combined Exchange Training*, GAO/NSIAD-99-173 (Washington, D.C.: July 23, 1999).

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## Background

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### Special Operations Command Legislative Responsibilities

In 1986, the Congress called for the establishment of a joint service special operations capability under a single command.<sup>7</sup> In April 1987, the Secretary of Defense established the Special Operations Command with the mission to provide trained and combat-ready special operations forces to DOD's geographic combatant commands. Section 167(e) of Title 10, U.S. Code<sup>8</sup> directs that the Commander of the Special Operations Command be responsible for and have the authority to conduct all affairs of such command related to special operations activities. Under this section, the Commander is also responsible for and has the authority to conduct certain functions relating to special operations activities whether or not they relate to the Special Operations Command, including: preparing and submitting to the Secretary of Defense program recommendations and budget proposals for special operations forces and for other forces assigned to the Special Operations Command; exercising authority, direction, and control over the expenditure of funds; training assigned forces; and monitoring the promotions, assignments, retention, training, and professional military education of special operations forces officers.

In addition, Section 167 directs the Special Operations Command to be responsible for the following activities as they relate to special operations: (1) direct action, (2) strategic reconnaissance, (3) unconventional warfare, (4) foreign internal defense, (5) civil affairs, (6) psychological operations, (7) counterterrorism, (8) humanitarian assistance, (9) theater search and rescue, and (10) other activities such as may be specified by the President or the Secretary of Defense.<sup>9</sup> Appendix II defines these activities assigned to the Special Operations Command. DOD has also assigned additional activities to the Special Operations Command.

### Expanded Special Operations Command Mission

Over the past 3 years, DOD has expanded the role of the Special Operations Command to include responsibility for planning and leading the department's efforts in the Global War on Terrorism. In addition to training, organizing, equipping, and deploying combat-ready special

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<sup>7</sup> Pub. L. No. 99-591, § 9115 (1986) (codified as amended at 10 U.S.C. § 167).

<sup>8</sup> 10 U.S.C. § 167(e).

<sup>9</sup> 10 U.S.C. § 167(j).

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operations forces to the geographic combatant commanders, the Command has the mission to lead, plan, synchronize, and, as directed, execute global operations against terrorist networks. The specific responsibilities assigned to the Special Operations Command include:

- integrating DOD strategy, plans, intelligence priorities, and operations against terrorist networks designated by the Secretary of Defense;
- planning campaigns against designated terrorist networks;
- prioritizing and synchronizing theater security cooperation activities, deployments, and capabilities that support campaigns against designated terrorist networks in coordination with the geographic combatant commanders;
- exercising command and control of operations in support of selected campaigns, as directed; and
- providing military representation to U.S. national and international agencies for matters related to U.S. and multinational campaigns against designated terrorist networks, as directed by the Secretary of Defense.

In addition, the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism<sup>10</sup> establishes the approach DOD will take in fulfilling its role within the larger national strategy for combating terrorism. The strategy provides guidance on the department's military objectives and their relative priority in the allocation of resources. In addition, this strategy implements the designation of the Special Operations Command as the supported combatant command for planning, synchronizing, and, as directed, executing global operations against terrorist networks.<sup>11</sup>

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## Increased Funding for Expanded Responsibilities

The Special Operations Command has received considerable increases in funding to meet its expanded responsibilities in the Global War on Terrorism. Specifically, funding for the Command has increased from more than \$3.8 billion in fiscal year 2001 to more than \$6.4 billion in fiscal year 2005. In addition, the Command received more than \$5 billion in supplemental funds from fiscal year 2001 through fiscal year 2005. During

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<sup>10</sup> DOD, *The National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* (February 2006).

<sup>11</sup> In the context of joint operation planning, the supported commander refers to a commander who prepares operation plans or operation orders in response to requirements of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In the context of a support-command relationship, the supported commander receives assistance from another commander's force or capabilities, and is responsible for ensuring that the supporting commander understands what assistance is required.

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this time, funding for military personnel costs for the Special Operations Command increased by more than \$800 million, representing a 53 percent increase. DOD plans further increases in funding for the Command. The President's fiscal year 2007 budget request for the Special Operations Command is \$8 billion, and the department plans additional increases for the Command through fiscal year 2011.

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## Organization of Special Operations Forces

The Special Operations Command is comprised of special operations forces from each of the military services. In fiscal year 2005, personnel authorizations for Army special operations forces military personnel totaled more than 30,000, the Air Force 11,501, the Navy 6,255, and the Marine Corps 79.<sup>12</sup> Roughly one-third of special operations forces military personnel were in DOD's reserve components,<sup>13</sup> including the Army, Navy, and Air Force Reserve, and the Army and Air National Guard.<sup>14</sup> Figure 1 provides a summary of DOD's special operations forces military authorizations in the active component and reserve component.

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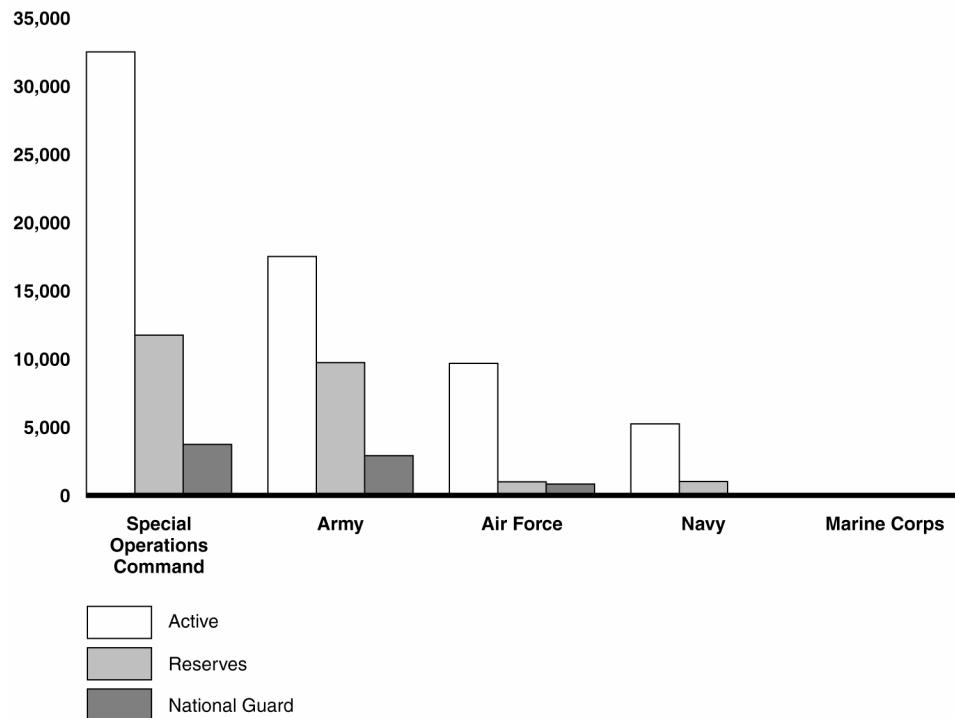
<sup>12</sup> In October 2005, the Secretary of Defense approved the establishment of a Marine Corps component to the Special Operations Command. Current DOD plans call for Marine Corps special operations forces personnel to total about 2,500 personnel by fiscal year 2011.

<sup>13</sup> DOD's military forces consist of the active components (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force) and the reserve and National Guard components (Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve).

<sup>14</sup> DOD plans call for the Special Operations Command to transfer all reserve component Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations personnel to the U.S. Army Reserve Command by fiscal year 2007. Currently, all active component and reserve component Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations forces are assigned to the Special Operations Command, even though the reserve component forces primarily support conventional Army forces. The Special Operations Command believes that reassigning the operational control of these forces to the Army will enable conventional Army units to train with their full complement of capabilities, including Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations, prior to a deployment, thereby enhancing combat readiness. The active component Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations forces, who support special operations forces, will continue to be assigned to the Special Operations Command. In addition, the Command will retain the responsibility for training reserve component Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations personnel and the research and development responsibility for Psychological Operations equipment.

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**Figure 1: Fiscal Year 2005 Military Positions for Special Operations Forces Personnel in the Active Component and Reserve Component**



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

Special operations forces are organized into several types of units. For example, Army special operations forces are organized into Special Forces, Rangers, Aviation, Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, and support units. Air Force special operations forces are organized into fixed and rotary wing aviation squadrons, special tactics squadrons, a combat aviation advisor squadron, and an unmanned aerial vehicle squadron. Naval Special Warfare forces include SEAL Teams and SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams and Special Boat Teams. When fully operational, Marine Corps special operations forces will include foreign military training units and marine special operations companies. Table 1 provides an overview and description of DOD's special operations forces.

**Table 1: Overview of Special Operations Forces within the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps**

<b>Service component</b>	<b>Type of unit</b>	<b>Description</b>
Army	Special Forces	Perform foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, special reconnaissance, direct action, and counterterrorism operations
	Rangers	Light infantry units specializing in a range of missions, including direct action and personnel recovery
	Rotary Wing Aviation	Provide aviation support to special operations forces
	Civil Affairs	Provide civil-military operations support to general purpose forces and special operations forces at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels
	Psychological Operations	Plan and execute psychological operations at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels
	Support and Communication Units	Provide combat service support to Army special operations forces or forces supporting the geographic combatant commander
Air Force	Fixed Wing Aviation Squadrons	Multiple variants of the C-130 modified for refueling, mobility, psychological operations, and precision strike
	Rotary Wing Aviation Squadrons	Provide mobility for special operations forces and combat search and rescue
	Special Tactics Squadrons	Combat controllers, pararescue, and combat weather personnel capable of controlling fire support and providing medical and weather support
	Combat Aviation Advisor Squadron	Assess, train, advise, and assist foreign aviation forces in airpower employment, sustainment, and force integration
	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron	Provide unmanned aerial vehicle support to special operations forces
Navy	Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) Teams	Multipurpose units trained and equipped to conduct a variety of missions in all operational environments
	SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams	Specially trained personnel who operate and maintain various systems, including dry dock shelters and SEAL delivery vehicles
	Special Boat Teams	Special warfare combatant crewmen who operate and maintain various naval special warfare boats
Marine Corps	Foreign Military Training Units	Provide tailored military, combat skills training, and advisor support for identified foreign forces
	Special Operations Companies	Perform special reconnaissance, direct action, and foreign internal defense operations

<b>Service component</b>	<b>Type of unit</b>	<b>Description</b>
	Special Operations Support Group	Provide specific support capabilities for worldwide special operations missions, including combined arms, K-9 support, communications support, and combat service support

Source: GAO.

Special operations forces personnel possess highly specialized skill sets including cultural and regional awareness. Duty in special operations is undertaken on a voluntary basis, and many personnel volunteering for special operations, particularly those in Army Special Forces and Air Force flight crews, have already served for some time in the military before becoming qualified for special operations forces. In order to become qualified, military personnel must complete a rigorous assessment, selection, and initial training process that, on average, takes between 12 and 24 months. This difficult training regime causes high attrition, and often over 70 percent who start special operations training do not finish. In general, servicemembers who are unable to complete the special operations training return to their previously held specialty or are retrained into another specialty, depending on the needs of their military service.

The Special Operations Command's Army, Air Force, and Navy service components have schools to train and develop special operations forces. For example:

- The U.S. Army Special Operations Command, located at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, operates the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School. This school assesses, selects, and trains Special Forces soldiers, and trains civil affairs and psychological operations soldiers. In addition, the school provides advanced special operations training courses.
- The Air Force Special Operations Command, located at Hurlburt Field, Florida, has several subordinate training squadrons that provide initial and advanced training for Air Force rotary and fixed wing special operations pilots, special tactics personnel, combat aviation advisors, and unmanned aerial vehicle personnel.
- The Naval Special Warfare Command, located on the Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, California, operates the Naval Special Warfare Center. This school trains SEAL candidates through the Basic Underwater Demolition SEAL course and the SEAL Qualification Course, and trains special warfare combatant crewmen through the Special Warfare Combatant Crewmen course. In addition, the school provides advanced special operations training courses.

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## **Analyses to Ensure That Special Operations Command Personnel Requirements Are Linked with Expanded Mission Are Still in Progress**

The Special Operations Command has not yet fully determined all of the personnel requirements needed to meet its expanded mission. While the Command has determined the number of special operations forces personnel who are needed to increase the number of its warfighter units, it has not completed analyses to determine (a) the number of headquarters staff needed to train and equip these additional warfighters or (b) the number of headquarters staff needed to plan and synchronize global actions against terrorist networks—a new mission for the Command. Although the Command's analyses for these determinations were in progress at the time of our review, DOD has nonetheless planned to increase the number of positions for the Command's headquarters, and has requested related funds beginning in fiscal year 2007.

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## **DOD and the Special Operations Command Have Determined Requirements for Additional Special Operations Forces Warfighters**

Several recent DOD studies have concluded that additional special operations forces warfighters are needed in order for the Special Operations Command to achieve the national military objectives in the Global War on Terrorism. A December 2002 report conducted by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict<sup>15</sup> found that efforts should be made to expand the size of special operations forces and institute a more sustainable rotational base of forces, while realigning the force to meet current and future challenges.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the February 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* stated that one of the key programmatic decisions the department proposes to launch in fiscal year 2007 is to increase special operations forces to defeat terrorist networks.<sup>17</sup>

The Special Operations Command has determined the number of special operations forces personnel needed to meet increases in its warfighter units. To determine the requirements for special operations forces warfighter units, the Command uses its Joint Mission Analysis process. Based on planning scenarios provided by DOD that special operations forces will be needed to support, the Command determines the minimum number of warfighters necessary to achieve its military objectives with the least amount of risk to mission success. This level of special operations

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<sup>15</sup> The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict is the principal civilian advisor to the Secretary of Defense on matters involving special operations.

<sup>16</sup> DOD, *Special Operations Forces Realignment Study* (December 2002).

<sup>17</sup> DOD, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (February 2006).

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forces is the baseline force used to measure risk, and is the starting point for developing a more attainable force based on fiscal constraints.

Beginning in fiscal year 2002, DOD increased the number of positions for the Special Operations Command to augment the increase in the number of its warfighter units. Specifically, from fiscal year 2001 through fiscal year 2005, DOD increased the number of military positions for special operations forces by more than 5,000 positions, or about 12 percent. With these increases in military positions, the Special Operations Command has also increased the number of special operations forces units, including Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations units. DOD plans to further increase the number of military positions for the Command through fiscal year 2011, and the Command plans to increase other special operations forces units such as Army Special Forces, Navy SEALS, and Air Force unmanned aerial vehicle and intelligence squadrons.<sup>18</sup> The increase in military positions will also support the establishment of a Marine Corps component to the Special Operations Command, which was approved in October 2005. Table 2 provides examples of increases in the number of active duty special operations forces warfighter units from fiscal year 2001 through fiscal year 2011.

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to the increases in the number of new units, the Air Force plans to increase the number of personnel in existing special tactics and combat aviation advisor squadrons.

**Table 2: Examples of Increases in the Number of Active Duty Special Operations Forces Warfighter Units from Fiscal Year 2001 through Fiscal Year 2011**

Service component	Type of unit	Number of warfighter units	
		Fiscal year 2001	Fiscal year 2011
Army	Special Forces Battalions	15	19 <sup>a</sup>
	Aviation Battalions	3	4
	Ranger Companies	12	15
	Civil Affairs Companies	5	16
	Psychological Operations Companies	12	17
Air Force	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron	0	1
	Intelligence Squadron	0	1
Navy	SEAL Team Equivalents	8	10
Marine Corps	Foreign Military Training Companies	0	2
	Marine Special Operations Companies	0	9

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

<sup>a</sup>DOD plans call for the addition of four Special Forces battalions during the fiscal year 2007 to fiscal year 2011 Future Years Defense Program, with a fifth Special Forces battalion to be added during the fiscal year 2008 to fiscal year 2013 Future Years Defense Program.

## DOD Plans Personnel Increases for the Command's Headquarters to Meet Expanded Mission, Although Analyses Are Still in Progress

DOD's budget request for fiscal year 2007 includes increases in the number of personnel for the Special Operations Command's headquarters, even though the Command had not completed studies for headquarters' personnel requirements in two key areas. First, the Commander of the Special Operations Command is responsible for training assigned special operations forces, and developing and acquiring special operations-peculiar equipment.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, the Command believes that it has a commensurate need for additional headquarters staff to perform these responsibilities to support the increased number of warfighters necessary to win the Global War on Terrorism. Second, DOD's decision to expand the mission of the Special Operations Command calls for the Command to be responsible for planning and synchronizing global actions against terrorist networks. The Command further believes that it needs additional headquarters personnel to fulfill this responsibility.

<sup>19</sup> 10 U.S.C. §167(e).

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The Special Operations Command determines personnel requirements for its headquarters by conducting formal personnel studies. These studies are directed and approved by the Special Operations Command's leadership. The study teams conduct a variety of analyses to determine personnel requirements and interview individuals within the reviewed organization to determine the tasks they perform and the level of effort necessary to fulfill the workload requirements. The studies are used to validate the personnel requirements and support data-based decisions for allocating additional resources during the Special Operations Command's planning, programming, and budgeting processes. The Command is currently conducting studies to determine the number of military and civilian personnel who are needed at its headquarters to meet the Command's expanded responsibilities.

Although these studies were in progress at the time of our review, DOD has already made the decision to increase the number of military and civilian positions for the Command's headquarters, beginning with its fiscal year 2007 budget request. According to currently approved plans, DOD will increase the number of military and civilian positions for the Special Operations Command headquarters by more than 75 percent between fiscal years 2007 and 2011. These increases include more than 700 additional positions for the Command's Center for Special Operations, which combines the intelligence, operations, and planning functions at the headquarters to plan and direct the Global War on Terrorism. However, given the fact that the Command's internal analyses of personnel requirements were ongoing at the time of our review, the intended increase is not based on a comprehensive analysis of personnel requirements.

Our prior work has shown that strategic workforce planning addresses two critical needs for an organization. First, strategic workforce planning aligns an organization's human capital program with its current and emerging mission and programmatic goals. Second, such planning develops long-term strategies for acquiring, developing, and retaining the staff needed to achieve programmatic goals. A key principle in strategic workforce planning calls for determining the critical skills and competencies that will be needed to achieve current and future programmatic results.<sup>20</sup> However, until the Special Operations Command fully completes its analyses of the personnel requirements needed to carry

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<sup>20</sup> GAO-04-39.

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out its Title 10 responsibilities and its expanded mission, it cannot provide assurances to the Secretary of Defense and the Congress that currently planned growth in the number of personnel for the Command's headquarters will meet, exceed, or fall short of the requirements needed to address the Command's expanded mission.

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## Despite Progress, the Military Services and the Special Operations Command Face Challenges to Meet Planned Growth Goals

The military services and the Special Operations Command have made progress since fiscal year 2000 in recruiting, training, and retaining special operations forces personnel; however, the military services and the Special Operations Command must overcome persistently low personnel inventory levels and insufficient numbers of newly trained special operations forces personnel in some cases to meet DOD's plan to increase the number of special operations forces personnel through fiscal year 2011. In addition, the Special Operations Command does not have complete information from its service components on human capital challenges, including low personnel inventory levels and training limitations, and planned corrective actions, which it needs to evaluate the success of its service components' human capital approaches.

### The Military Services and the Special Operations Command Have Taken Measures to Recruit, Train, and Retain Greater Numbers of Special Operations Forces Personnel

#### Increased Recruiting Goals

The military services and the Special Operations Command have taken measures to recruit and train greater numbers of special operations forces personnel. In addition, DOD has implemented a set of initiatives intended to retain greater numbers of experienced special operations forces personnel.

The Army and Navy have increased the recruiting goals for several of their special operations forces occupational specialties.<sup>21</sup> These goals are set by the military services to determine the number of accessions, or new recruits, who will enter training each year. From fiscal year 2000 to fiscal year 2005, the Army increased the recruiting goal for active duty enlisted

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<sup>21</sup> The military services delineate their force structure through occupational specialties, which represent the jobs that are necessary to meet their specific missions.

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Special Forces soldiers by 72 percent, or 1,300 recruits.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the Navy increased its annual goal for enlisted SEAL recruits from 900 in fiscal year 2004 to 1,100 in fiscal year 2005. In addition, the Navy established an annual goal for enlisted special warfare combatant crewman recruits for the first time in fiscal year 2005.

To meet these recruiting goals, the military services have offered enlistment bonuses to enlist a sufficient number of new recruits. Collectively, the military services paid more than \$28 million in these bonuses during fiscal year 2005 to enlist servicemembers in their special operations forces occupational specialties. Beginning in fiscal year 2003, the Army offered these bonuses to its initial accession Special Forces recruits and in fiscal year 2005 the Army paid up to \$20,000 per soldier. Similarly, in fiscal year 2005, the Air Force offered enlistment bonuses of up to \$10,000 to recruits in the combat controller and pararescue occupational specialties. In fiscal year 2005, the Navy paid enlistment bonuses for enlisted SEAL and special warfare combatant crewman recruits up to a maximum of \$15,000. The Army met or exceeded its recruiting goals for active duty enlisted Special Forces soldiers in 5 out of the 6 years between fiscal years 2000 and 2005. From fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, the Air Force increased the number of enlisted airmen recruits for the combat controller and pararescue occupational specialties by about 400 percent and 60 percent, respectively. In fiscal year 2005, the Navy exceeded its recruiting goal for enlisted special warfare combatant crewmen. However, while the Navy met its recruiting goal for enlisted SEALs for fiscal year 2004, it met 80 percent of its recruiting goal in fiscal year 2005.

#### Expanded Training Capacity

The Special Operations Command and the service components have taken several actions to train greater numbers of special operations forces recruits. For instance, the Command and the service components have increased the number of instructors at several special operations forces schools to produce a larger number of newly trained personnel, with additional increases in the number of instructors planned through fiscal year 2011. The U.S. Army Special Operations Command, for example, hired 45 additional civilian instructors in fiscal year 2004 as part of its

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<sup>22</sup> From fiscal years 2000 through 2001, all of the recruits for Army Special Forces training were serving in the military. In fiscal year 2002, the Army established a goal of 400 accessions for an initial accessions program, which brings new Army recruits directly into Special Forces training. The Army increased the goal for these recruits from 400 in fiscal year 2002 to 1,500 in fiscal year 2005.

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Institutional Training Expansion program, and plans to add more than 300 additional civilian instructors through fiscal year 2011. Similarly, beginning in fiscal year 2006, the Naval Special Warfare Command plans to add 145 military and civilian instructors through fiscal year 2008.

The Special Operations Command's service components have also expanded the capacity of some schools to train more students and have reorganized some of their curricula so that their recruits move through the training programs more efficiently. Beginning in fiscal year 2006, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command increased the frequency of a phase of its Special Forces qualification training that is focused on core battle skills. The U.S. Army Special Operations Command plans to increase the frequency of this phase from starting four courses per year, to starting a new course approximately every 2 weeks. This increase in frequency will expand the capacity of the training course from 1,800 student spaces to about 2,300 per year.

The Air Force Special Operations Command established a training program in fiscal year 2001 to provide advanced skills training for combat controllers. In addition, the training program was intended to provide standardized training for special operations pararescue personnel, special operations combat weathermen,<sup>23</sup> and special tactics officers. Since its inception, the program has increased the graduation rate of combat controllers, and in addition, the training program has provided special operations pararescue airmen, combat weathermen, and special tactics officers with advanced special operations training.

In fiscal year 2005, the Naval Special Warfare Command reorganized the training course for SEALs intended to reduce student attrition. Specifically, the Naval Special Warfare Command eliminated the class administered during the winter months, which historically had the highest attrition, while increasing the class sizes for the remaining classes. In addition, the Naval Special Warfare Command has begun providing focused training for those students who have completed the most physically challenging portion of the training but who require additional practice in specific skills, rather than requiring students to begin the training from the start.

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<sup>23</sup> The Air Force trains pararescue and combat weather personnel for conventional units and special operations forces units. In order to be fully qualified for special operations missions, these personnel undergo additional special tactics training.

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In some cases, the Special Operations Command and the service components have increased the number of newly trained special operations forces personnel. From fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, for example, the school that trains new Special Forces soldiers increased the number of active duty enlisted graduates by 138 percent, or 458 additional Special Forces soldiers.

#### Retention Incentives for Experienced Personnel

DOD has also taken action to retain experienced special operations forces personnel in order to meet the planned growth in these forces. According to the Special Operations Command, it cannot accomplish planned growth solely by adding new special operations forces personnel. Rather, the growth must be accomplished by balancing an increase in the number of new personnel with the retention of experienced special operations forces servicemembers. In 2004, DOD authorized a set of financial incentives to retain experienced special operations forces personnel. These incentives include reenlistment bonuses of up to \$150,000 for personnel in several special operations forces occupational specialties with 19 or more years of experience who reenlist for an additional 6 years. The military services spent more than \$41 million in fiscal year 2005 to retain 688 special operations forces servicemembers with this reenlistment bonus, according to data provided by the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. Additionally, DOD authorized increases in special pays for warfighters assigned to the Special Operations Command, for some special operations forces personnel who remain on active duty with more than 25 years of experience, and bonuses for new Special Forces and Naval Special Warfare warrant officers.

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#### Personnel Inventory Levels and Insufficient Numbers of Some Special Operations Forces Training Graduates May Limit the Special Operations Command's Ability to Meet Future Growth Targets

While the military services and the Special Operations Command have taken steps to increase the number of newly trained special operations forces personnel and to retain its experienced operators, the military services and the Special Operations Command face several human capital challenges in fully meeting planned growth in special operations forces. These challenges include persistently low personnel inventory levels for many special operations forces occupational specialties and insufficient numbers of new graduates in some cases to meet current authorized personnel levels or planned growth targets.

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**Low Personnel Inventory  
Levels in Some Special  
Operations Forces  
Occupational Specialties May  
Limit Future Growth**

We reported in November 2005 that DOD faced significant challenges in recruiting and retaining servicemembers, and that the military services were unable to meet authorized personnel levels for certain occupational specialties, including several special operations forces occupational specialties.<sup>24</sup> At that time, we reported that several of these specialties in the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps were underfilled for 5 out of the previous 6 fiscal years. Such occupational specialties included active duty enlisted Army Special Forces assistant operations and intelligence sergeants and Special Forces medical sergeants, enlisted Navy SEALs and special warfare combatant crewmen, and enlisted Air Force combat controllers and pararescue personnel. According to DOD officials, the special operations forces occupational specialties were underfilled for several reasons, including extensive training or qualification requirements and recent increases in the number of authorized personnel positions.

Our analysis of the personnel inventory levels for the special operations forces active component occupational specialties identified by the Special Operations Command's Directive 600-7<sup>25</sup> shows that hundreds of authorized positions for special operations forces personnel within each of the Command's service components have been persistently unfilled. As shown in table 3, from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, 74 percent to 87 percent of the active component occupational specialties in this directive were underfilled, each year, by an amount ranging from less than 5 percent to more than 86 percent.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD Needs Action Plan to Address Enlisted Personnel Recruitment and Retention Challenges*, GAO-06-134 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 17, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Special Operations Command Directive 600-7 identifies the occupational specialties on which the Command's service components report personnel data. The service components report these data to the Special Operations Command on an annual basis.

<sup>26</sup> Our analysis also shows that to a lesser extent, some active component occupational specialties in the Command's directive were overfilled. For example, from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, 9 percent to 21 percent of these specialties were overfilled each year by an amount ranging from less than 5 percent to 80 percent. Except in a few cases, these specialties were overfilled by less than 30 personnel.

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**Table 3: Number and Percentage of Active Component Special Operations Forces Occupational Specialties Underfilled for Fiscal Years 2000 through 2005**

Fiscal year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Number of occupational specialties	33	34	37	38	38	38
Number of occupational specialties underfilled	27	27	31	28	33	31
Percentage of occupational specialties underfilled	82%	79%	84%	74%	87%	82%

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

Note: The increase in the number of active component occupational specialties from fiscal years 2000 through 2005 is due to the fact that U.S. Army data were unavailable for two specialties prior to fiscal year 2002, and the military services introduced three new specialties during this period.

In fiscal year 2005, more than 50 percent of these specialties were underfilled by at least 10 percent. For example:

- personnel authorizations for active duty enlisted Special Forces assistant operations and intelligence sergeants were underfilled by 58 percent,
- personnel authorizations for active duty enlisted pararescue airmen were underfilled by 27 percent, and
- personnel authorizations for active duty enlisted SEALs were underfilled by 14 percent.

Given the military services' inability to fill current and past positions in their special operations forces specialties, it may be increasingly difficult to meet DOD's plan to increase the number of special operations forces through fiscal year 2011. During our review, the Special Operations Command's service components provided data indicating that, in several cases, the measures the military services and the Special Operations Command are taking to recruit and train greater numbers of special operations forces personnel may enable the military services and the Command to meet the increases in the numbers of authorized positions. However, the data also show that some of the special operations forces specialties that are currently underfilled are likely to remain so after additional authorizations have been added. For example, Navy officials told us that although additional authorizations for enlisted SEALs will be added by fiscal year 2008, it will not be able to fill all of these positions until at least 2011, at the earliest. Similarly, the Air Force projects that the additional active duty enlisted combat controller positions that have been added in fiscal year 2006 will remain underfilled through at least fiscal year 2008.

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Not only do current low personnel inventory levels suggest that the military services and the Special Operations Command will be challenged to meet planned growth goals, but officials told us that low personnel levels in certain occupational specialties have created challenges at the unit level as well. For example, officials from the U.S. Army Special Operations Command told us that low personnel inventories of Special Forces warrant officers and medical sergeants have resulted in their having fewer numbers of these personnel per unit, which has limited the manner in which some Special Forces units have deployed on the battlefield. Similarly, the low personnel inventory levels in the Air Force combat controller and pararescue occupational specialties have resulted in the Air Force's special tactics squadrons being underfilled. According to Air Force officials, the low personnel inventory levels in these units have increased the frequency of personnel deployments, which has had an impact on the amount of time available to conduct training and has adversely affected retention.

#### Insufficient Numbers of Some Special Operations Forces Personnel Graduates

One reason that personnel inventory levels have been low in several special operations forces occupational specialties is the schools that train new special operations forces personnel have not graduated a sufficient number of these personnel, in some cases, to meet authorized personnel levels. Furthermore, the number of newly trained personnel in several special operations forces specialties has been insufficient to meet planned growth targets. For example:

- The U.S. Army Special Operations Command is not graduating enough new pilots for the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment to meet future growth targets. In fiscal year 2005, the Command graduated only 58 percent of the MH-47 Chinook helicopter pilots and 47 percent of the MH-60 Blackhawk helicopter pilots that the Army determined were needed to meet planned growth for this unit. According to Army officials, the capacity of the school that trains new pilots has been insufficient to meet the requirements for future personnel levels. Officials stated that the Special Operations Command has provided additional funding beginning in fiscal year 2006 for the school to hire a greater number of instructors, which will increase the capacity of the school to train these pilots.
- The Air Force has not produced a sufficient number of active duty enlisted special tactics personnel, such as combat controllers and pararescue personnel. For example, from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, the Air Force trained only 53 percent of the active duty enlisted combat controllers and 40 percent of the active duty enlisted pararescue airmen needed to meet authorized personnel levels. Air Force officials stated that several constraints have limited the number of students who could attend

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the schools that train these personnel. Officials explained the Air Force has taken steps to increase the number of personnel that will graduate from its special tactics training programs. For example, in August 2005, the Air Force began construction on a new classroom and aquatic facility to train greater numbers of combat controllers, and it recently opened a new combat dive course to meet both combat controller and pararescue training requirements. Such measures are intended to reduce the constraints on the ability of the Air Force to train new special tactics personnel.

- From fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, the Naval Special Warfare Command did not produce an adequate number of enlisted SEALs to sustain authorized personnel levels. While the Naval Special Warfare Command needed to graduate 200 new enlisted SEALs each year to meet authorized personnel levels, only about 150 new enlisted personnel graduated each year during this period. In addition, Navy officials stated that to meet the planned growth for SEALs, the Naval Special Warfare Command must produce 250 enlisted SEALs annually. According to Navy officials, it has recruited an insufficient number of enlisted candidates who could successfully pass the physical test to qualify for SEAL training. As a result, the Navy has not filled the SEAL school to capacity each year, and this in turn has resulted in insufficient numbers of graduates to fill the requirements for enlisted SEALs. According to officials, the Navy began to implement several measures in January 2006 that, in part, are intended to increase the quantity and quality of enlisted recruits entering SEAL training, thereby improving the chances that more of these recruits will successfully graduate from the training.<sup>27</sup>

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### Special Operations Command Lacks Key Information Needed to Evaluate Human Capital Initiatives

The Special Operations Command does not have complete information, including measurable performance objectives and goals, to evaluate the progress that the Command's service components have made in meeting the human capital challenges that could impede the Command's ability to achieve planned growth.

The Special Operations Command has an established program through which it monitors the status of its personnel. The goal of the program is to

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<sup>27</sup> These measures include requiring SEAL candidates to pass a physical screening test prior to the issuance of a SEAL enlistment contract and prior to shipping to Recruit Training Command; hiring former special operations forces personnel at each Naval Recruiting District to test, screen, and mentor SEAL candidates; increasing the initial enlistment bonus for SEAL recruits to the maximum authorized level of \$40,000; and improving the amount of physical training time at basic training by 300 percent, among other initiatives.

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ensure there are sufficient numbers of special operations forces personnel to meet current and future mission requirements. The implementing directive<sup>28</sup> requires the special operations component commanders to provide the Special Operations Command with annual reports that contain data on several topics related to the human capital management of special operations forces, including personnel inventory levels, accession plans, reenlistments and loss management programs, and military education opportunities for special operations forces officers. Command officials told us they use these reports to monitor the status of special operations forces.

Our analysis of the service components' annual reports for fiscal years 2000 through 2005 shows that the reports provide some of the information required by the directive, such as information on personnel inventory levels and professional military education opportunities. However, the reports have not provided information for several key requirements called for by the directive that would provide information on the service components' progress in meeting the planned growth targets. For example, the service components are required to provide accession plans for several of the special operations occupational specialties, including Army Special Forces, Navy SEALs, and Air Force special tactics personnel. The accession plans should provide detailed information on the number of new accessions for initial training and projections for the following year. Our review of the annual reports shows that since fiscal year 2003, none of the service components' submissions contained this information.

Additionally, the directive requires the service components to provide detailed analyses to support each category discussed in the annual report, including trends developed over recent years and predictions for the future. Further, the annual reports should fully discuss any concerns by describing the concern in context, providing past actions taken to resolve the concern, and presenting recommendations to address the concern in the future. However, our analysis of the components' annual submissions shows that the reports have often failed to provide detailed analyses of their human capital challenges and the corrective actions that should be taken to address these challenges. For instance:

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<sup>28</sup> Special Operations Command Directive 600-7, *Monitorship Program Policy and Procedures* (April 2003).

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- The U.S. Army Special Operations Command's annual report for fiscal year 2005 did not identify a 79 percent personnel fill rate for the Special Forces medical sergeant occupational specialty as a challenge. However, officials with whom we spoke indicated that insufficient numbers of these personnel have limited both the operational capabilities of some deployed Special Forces units and the ability to provide medical life-support to personnel in these units. In other cases, the U.S. Army Special Operations Command's annual reports identified challenges but did not propose corrective actions. For example, the report for fiscal year 2005 states a concern that, because the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment had insufficient training resources, it produced only 50 percent of the requirement for MH-47 Chinook helicopter pilots. However, the report did not discuss in detail what actions should be taken to address this challenge.
- Since its fiscal year 2000 annual report, the Air Force Special Operations Command has identified a concern that the experience level of its rated pilots has been decreasing. As a result, there have been an insufficient number of aircraft commanders and instructor pilots within several of the special operations squadrons. However, the Air Force Special Operations Command's annual reports do not contain any information to support the specific decrease in the number of experienced pilots in its special operations forces units. Moreover, the reports do not specify how the actions taken to address the issue have impacted the level of experience of pilots, or what further actions are needed to address this challenge. In addition, although the combat controller and pararescue occupational specialties have been underfilled since at least fiscal year 2000, the Air Force's annual reports have not provided detailed information on the specific actions that should be taken to overcome the challenges of low personnel inventory levels in these specialties.
- The Naval Special Warfare Command's annual reports have consistently identified a critical challenge regarding the insufficient number of new enlisted Navy SEALs who have graduated from the school each year. Further, the reports provide some information on the actions taken in the previous fiscal year to address this concern. However, the annual reports have not included detailed information on the Naval Special Warfare Command's accession plans, or the effects that recruit shortfalls have had on personnel inventory levels, which are specifically required by the directive.

Furthermore, the service components' annual reports lack performance objectives and goals that link key personnel data with future growth plans and assessments of personnel needs. Our prior work has shown that high-performing organizations use relevant and reliable data to determine performance objectives and goals that enable them to evaluate the success

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of their human capital approaches. These organizations identify current and future human capital needs, including the appropriate number of employees, the key competencies and skills mix for mission accomplishment, and the appropriate deployment of staff across the organization, and then create strategies for identifying and filling gaps.<sup>29</sup> However, our analysis of the Command's Directive 600-7 shows that the requirements for the annual reports do not include instructions for the service components to develop performance objectives, goals, and measures of progress for achieving planned growth. As an example, the Command requires the service components to provide personnel reenlistment data within these reports. Specifically, the Command requires information and analysis on the number of eligible special operations forces personnel who chose to reenlist and comparative information on the number of personnel reenlistments in each military service. However, the service components' annual reports do not clearly link the number of experienced warfighters who have been retained with the number who are needed to meet planned growth. This is particularly important because the parent military services have not set goals for the reenlistments of their special operations forces personnel in a way that is clearly linked with the planned growth in these forces. Each of the active component military services tracks retention according to years of service and whether a servicemember is on a first, second, or subsequent enlistment.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the Special Operations Command has not established specific performance objectives or goals for the special operations forces retention initiative that DOD authorized in December 2004. As a result, it is difficult to assess the progress that DOD has had with this initiative in retaining a sufficient number of experienced personnel to meet planned growth—a key rationale for the initiative. Many of the special operations forces servicemembers who were eligible for the bonuses offered as part of this

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<sup>29</sup> GAO, *Military Personnel: Oversight Process Needed to Help Maintain Momentum of DOD's Strategic Human Capital Planning*, GAO-03-237 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 5, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> The Army tracks retention rates by initial term (first enlistment, regardless of length), midcareer (second or subsequent enlistment with up to 10 years of service), and career (second or subsequent enlistment with 10 or more years of service). The Navy's retention categories are Zone A (up to 6 years of service), Zone B (6 years to 10 years of service), Zone C (10 to 14 years of service), Zone D (14 to 19 years of service), and Zone E (20 or more years of service). Through June 2005, the Air Force tracked retention by first term (first enlistment, regardless of length), second term (second enlistment), and career (third or subsequent enlistment). Beginning in July 2005, the Air Force changed from reporting reenlistment rates as the primary retention measure to calculating a retention metric, Average Career Length, which factors in losses that occur at all years of service.

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initiative did reenlist, as shown by information provided to us. However, Special Operations Command officials were unable to provide specific goals to measure the effectiveness of the retention initiatives because they lacked clear performance objectives that are linked to comprehensive analyses of personnel needs.

Special Operations Command officials stated the Command had not fully enforced the reporting requirements in its directive because it is outdated and some of the information required in the annual reports is less relevant, given the Command's expanded role in the Global War on Terrorism. However, the Command most recently updated this directive in April 2003, and at that time, it maintained the annual reporting requirements. In addition, officials stated that data and information on the status of special operations forces personnel are available to the Special Operations Command through other processes, including monthly and quarterly readiness reports, monthly personnel status summaries, and annual conferences hosted by the Command to discuss personnel issues. The Defense Manpower Data Center also provides the Command with analyses on the trends in the continuation rates of special operations forces personnel.<sup>31</sup> While these processes may provide information on the status of special operations forces, they do not provide detailed analyses and discussions of concerns and corrective actions that are required by the Command's directive. In addition, the annual reports are a means by which the Command has provided information to stakeholders within the department—including the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the military services—on the status of special operations forces. Without complete information on human capital challenges, the Special Operations Command will be unable to determine whether the service components' human capital management approaches, including their recruiting, training, and retention strategies, will be effective in meeting the planned growth targets.

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<sup>31</sup> Continuation rates are calculated by determining the number of personnel who remain on active duty from one year to the next, and are an alternative method to track retention.

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## More Deployments for Operations Mean Fewer Deployments for Training; Special Operations Command Has Sought to Manage This Effect

### Data Trends Show Increase in Deployments for Operations and Decrease in Training

Since fiscal year 2000, special operations forces have experienced a substantial increase in the deployment of personnel for operations and a simultaneous decrease in the deployment of personnel for training. To its credit, the Special Operations Command has taken action to manage the challenge of increased deployments by establishing a policy intended to maintain the readiness, retention, and training of special operations forces personnel. However, the Command's service components have not yet consistently or fully implemented this policy.

The Special Operations Command Directive 525-1<sup>32</sup> establishes the Command's policy to collect and monitor information on the deployments of special operations forces personnel. Accordingly, the Command gathers deployment information on a weekly basis from the service components and the geographic combatant commands. These reports include information on the number of special operations forces personnel and special operations forces units that are deployed around the world. In addition, the components report the type of the deployment, such as deployments for operations or for training. From these weekly updates, the Special Operations Command develops a comprehensive deployed forces report, which is presented to the Commander of the Special Operations Command and included in updates for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

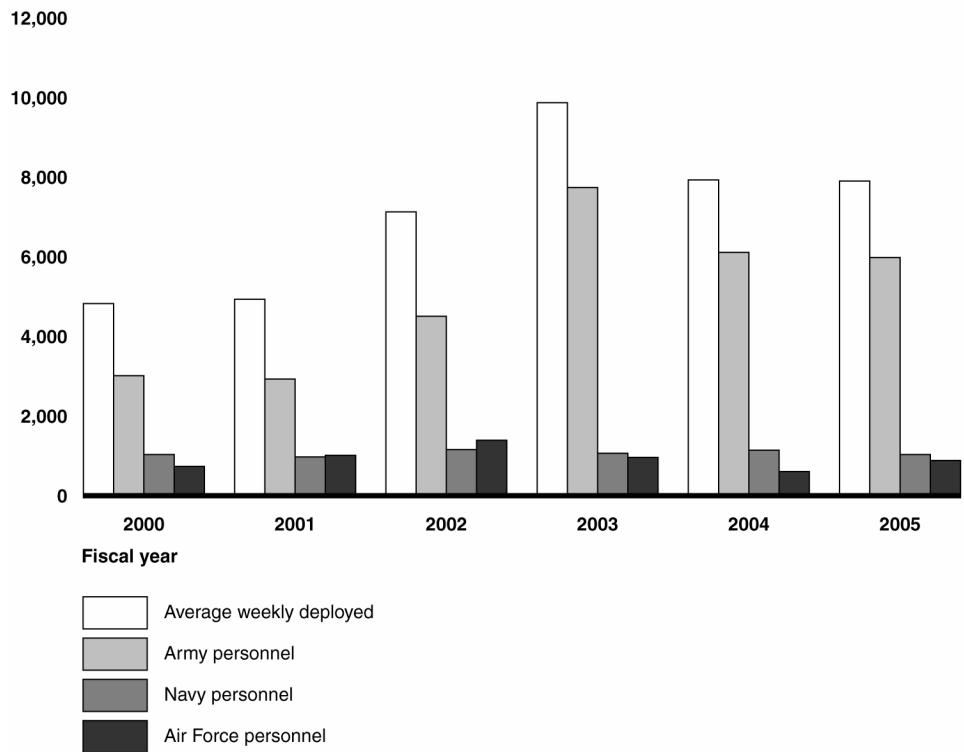
Our review of Special Operations Command data shows that since fiscal year 2000, deployments of special operations forces personnel have substantially increased. Specifically, as shown in figure 2, the average weekly number of deployed special operations forces personnel was 64 percent, or about 3,100 personnel, greater in fiscal year 2005 than in fiscal year 2000.

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<sup>32</sup> Special Operations Command Directive 525-1, *Deployed Forces Report* (March 2004).

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**Figure 2: Average Weekly Number of Special Operations Forces Deployed Fiscal Year 2000 through Fiscal Year 2005**

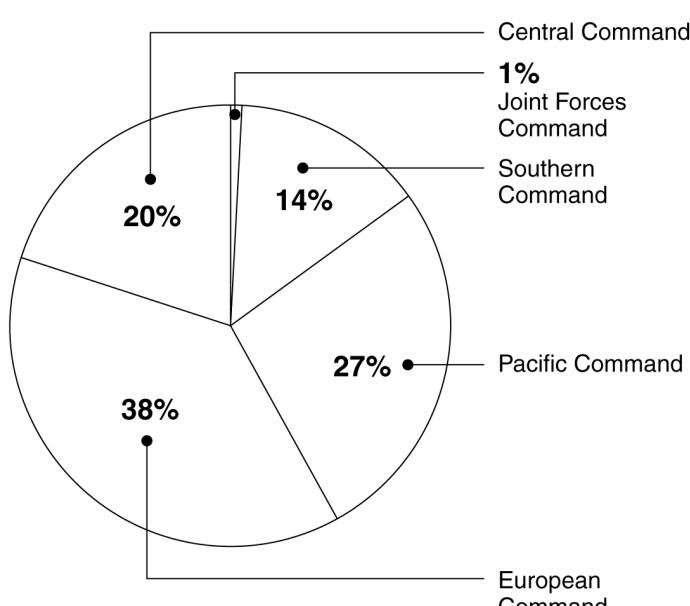


Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

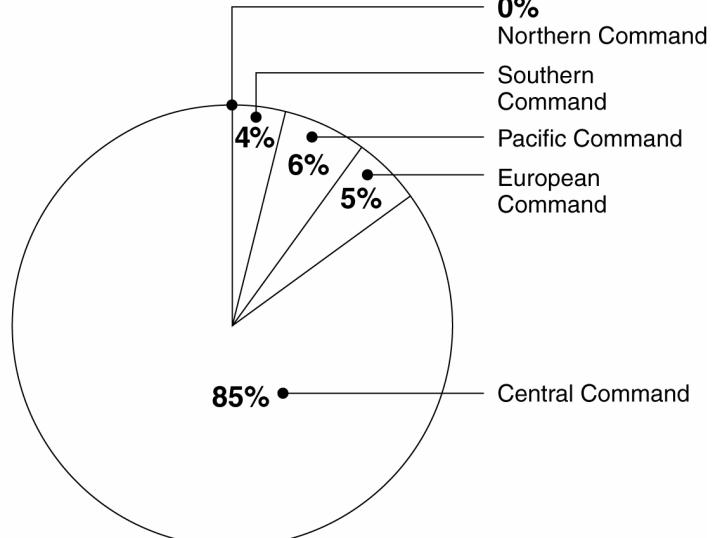
Our analysis also shows that the vast majority of recent deployments outside of the United States were to the Central Command area of responsibility, which accounted for 85 percent of deployed special operations forces in fiscal year 2005. Significantly, more than 99 percent of these deployments supported ongoing combat operations. In contrast, in fiscal year 2000, only 20 percent of special operations forces deployments were to the Central Command. As shown in figure 3, the percentage of special operations forces personnel deployed to the European Command, the Pacific Command, and the Southern Command decreased between fiscal year 2000 and fiscal year 2005.

**Figure 3: Percentage of Special Operations Forces Personnel Deployed to the Unified Combatant Commands, Fiscal Year 2000 and Fiscal Year 2005**

Fiscal year 2000



Fiscal year 2005



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

While special operations forces have experienced a substantial increase in deployments for operations, there has been a simultaneous decrease in deployments for training. As shown in table 4, from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, the percentage of special operations forces personnel deployed for operations increased, while the percentage of personnel deployed for training decreased.

**Table 4: Percentage of Special Operations Forces Personnel Deployed for Training, Operations, and Other, Fiscal Year 2000 through Fiscal Year 2005**

Deployment category	Fiscal year 2000	Fiscal year 2001	Fiscal year 2002	Fiscal year 2003	Fiscal year 2004	Fiscal year 2005
Training	61%	58%	30%	16%	17%	17%
Operations	31%	31%	65%	81%	80%	80%
Other	8%	11%	5%	3%	3%	4%

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

Note: Totals may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

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The decrease in deployments for training appears to have had at least two effects. From fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, for example, the amount of time for which special operations forces deployed for training to maintain proficiency in battle skills<sup>33</sup> decreased by 50 percent. Officials with the Army, Navy, and Air Force service components told us that since many of their units have been deployed to the Central Command area of responsibility, they have had fewer opportunities to conduct proficiency training for all mission tasks. As a result, special operations forces units are focusing their training on the tasks that are required for operations in the Central Command and are assuming some risk by not training for other mission tasks. For example, officials with the U.S. Army Special Operations Command told us that specialized training such as military free fall and underwater combat operations have been reduced to a minimum, since these skills are not required to support ongoing operations.

Similarly, officials with the Air Force Special Operations Command stated that increased deployments for operations had affected the ability of its air crews and special tactics squadrons to achieve all required mission-essential training. However, officials stated that this has not degraded overall readiness, because not all of these training tasks are currently being performed in the Central Command. In addition, officials stated that if mission priorities were to shift away from the Central Command and different missions needed to be performed, not all of its special operations forces personnel would be required to have achieved those training tasks in order for a mission to be successfully carried out.

Additionally, although our analysis shows that special operations forces deployed less frequently for skills proficiency training from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, we were told that the amount of training that special operations forces accomplished may not have been greatly affected. In particular, we were told that Army special operations forces units do not necessarily have to deploy in order to accomplish training that can be done at their home station. In addition, the fact that many special operations forces units are deploying for combat operations results in ample opportunities to maintain proficiency in essential skills. Officials with the U.S. Army Special Operations Command explained that special operations forces no longer train to fight because they are training as they

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<sup>33</sup> Battle skills proficiency training includes the deployment of individuals or units for a range of purposes, such as advanced occupational specialty training, language training, or unit battle drills.

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fight. However, not all special operations forces can accomplish training tasks at their home station. According to Naval Special Warfare Command officials, Naval Special Warfare units do not have adequate home station training ranges and are required to deploy in order achieve most training tasks. Yet, from fiscal year 2000 to fiscal year 2005, the amount of time that Naval Special Warfare personnel deployed for skills proficiency training decreased by more than 30 percent.

Special operations forces have also deployed less frequently to train with foreign military forces overseas. As we have previously reported, this type of training is important because it enables special operations forces to practice mission skills such as providing military instruction in a foreign language and maintaining language proficiency and familiarity with local geography and cultures, which are essential in the foreign internal defense and unconventional warfare missions.<sup>34</sup> These deployments of special operations forces to train with the armed forces and other security forces of friendly foreign countries are commonly referred to as joint combined exchange training. Between fiscal year 2000 and fiscal year 2005, however, the amount of time in which special operations forces personnel deployed for joint combined exchange training decreased by 53 percent.

Our analysis of DOD data reported to the Congress<sup>35</sup> also shows the participation of special operations forces in joint combined exchange training events decreased since fiscal year 2000. As shown in figure 4, from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, the number of these events that special operations forces completed decreased by about 50 percent. Further analysis shows that the number of events conducted in most of the geographic combatant command areas of responsibility decreased from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005. Specifically, joint combined exchange training events conducted in the European Command decreased by about 75 percent, while events conducted in the Southern Command and Pacific Command also decreased during this time. Conversely, the number of such training events conducted in the Central Command

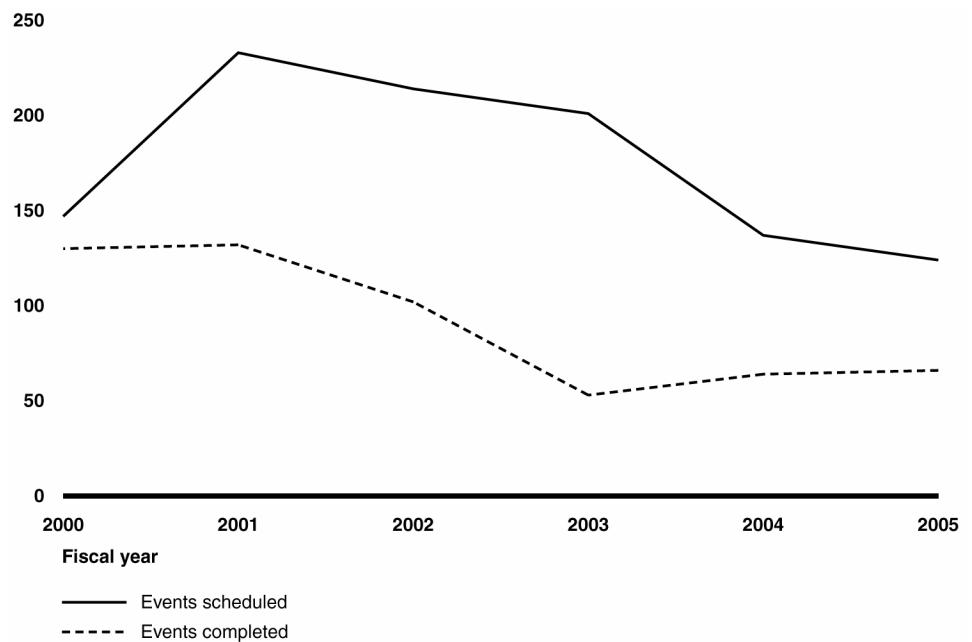
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<sup>34</sup> GAO/NSIAD-99-173.

<sup>35</sup> Section 2011 of Title 10, U.S. Code requires the Secretary of Defense to submit an annual report to the Congress regarding training for which expenses are paid under this section. The report is to include the type and location of training conducted, the extent of participation by foreign military forces, the relationship of that training to other overseas training programs, a summary of expenditures under this section, and a discussion of the unique military training benefit derived from the training activities.

increased from 7 exercises in fiscal year 2000 to 14 exercises in fiscal year 2005.<sup>36</sup>

**Figure 4: Joint Combined Exchange Training Events Scheduled and Completed, Fiscal Year 2000 through Fiscal Year 2005**



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

The increase in the amount of time that special operations forces have deployed to support operations in the Central Command has, to some extent, resulted in an increase in the number of cancelled joint combined exchange training events. Officials with the Special Operations Command, European Command, Pacific Command, and Southern Command with whom we spoke stated that joint combined exchange training can be cancelled for various reasons, including the availability of funding for the training, the availability of host nation forces, or the operations tempo<sup>37</sup> of U.S. special operations forces. Officials stated, however, that due to the

<sup>36</sup> The Northern Command was established on October 1, 2002, to provide command and control of DOD homeland defense efforts and to coordinate military assistance to civil authorities. Special operations forces conducted one joint combined exchange training event in the Northern Command in fiscal year 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Operations tempo is a measure of the frequency of the deployment of a unit or platform.

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increased requirement for special operations forces deployments to support operations in the Central Command, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of cancelled joint combined exchange training events. Our analysis shows that from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, the percentage of cancelled training events due to the operations tempo of special operations forces increased from 0 percent to more than 60 percent.

While the primary purpose of joint combined exchange training is to train U.S. forces, this training can also have an ancillary benefit in that it can be used by the geographic combatant commanders and ambassadors to fulfill regional and country engagement objectives. For instance, the geographic combatant commands use joint combined exchange training to help achieve foreign engagement objectives in their designated areas of responsibility. DOD documents regarding the department's strategy for the Global War on Terrorism identify combined training, such as joint combined exchange training, as an important element to strengthen partner nations' counterterrorism capabilities. However, with continuing support being required for operations in the Central Command's area of responsibility, there have been fewer special operations forces available to execute these types of training activities.

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### Special Operations Command Has Established a Policy to Manage Increased Deployments, but the Policy Has Not Been Consistently or Fully Implemented

The Special Operations Command has taken action to manage the challenge of increased personnel deployments. Monitoring the status of personnel deployments has been an area of congressional and DOD concern. The management of personnel tempo<sup>38</sup> is important to the quality of life and retention of military personnel. Section 991 of Title 10 of the U.S. Code states that the deployment (or potential deployment) of a member of the Armed Forces shall be managed. Moreover, DOD has recognized that failure to effectively manage personnel tempo can result in the continued loss of trained personnel, a consequent loss of readiness capability, and an increased recruiting challenge. In addition, we have previously reported that high personnel tempo for special operations forces can affect readiness, retention, and morale.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Personnel tempo is a measure of the frequency of the deployment of any one person.

<sup>39</sup> GAO, *Special Operations Forces: Opportunities to Preclude Overuse and Misuse*, GAO/NSIAD-97-85 (Washington, D.C.: May 15, 1997).

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In August 2005, the Special Operations Command established a policy intended to maintain the readiness, retention, and training of active duty special operations forces personnel.<sup>40</sup> The policy requires the Command's active duty personnel to remain at least an equal amount of time at their home station as they do deployed for operations and training. The policy also requires that the Special Operations Command's service components develop internal tracking mechanisms to ensure that their active duty special operations forces personnel remain within the policy's deployment requirements.<sup>41</sup> However, the Command's service components have not consistently or fully implemented the deployment policy.

One challenge lies in the fact that the policy's guidelines are not clear. Officials with the Command's service components noted a lack of clear guidance regarding how the components should implement the deployment guidelines, and consequently they were implementing it differently from one another. For example, the policy does not identify the length of time for which the components must ensure that personnel remain within the deployment guidelines. In addition, it does not state whether a servicemember must remain at a home station immediately following one deployment for an equal amount of time before a next deployment. Because of the lack of clear guidance, the Special Operations Command's service components have had to interpret the intent of the policy's requirements to ensure that their personnel remain in compliance.

A second challenge lies in the difficulty of achieving full implementation. Officials with the Naval Special Warfare Command stated that they have been unable to comply with the deployment guidelines because personnel lack adequate home station training ranges. Specifically, Naval Special Warfare personnel must deploy for both unit training and operations. This combination of deployments has resulted in personnel having exceeded the policy's requirement. Naval Special Warfare Command officials indicated that they were working with the Special Operations Command and the Navy to implement the deployment policy. According to Navy officials, the Navy plans to provide the Naval Special Warfare Command with additional funds to improve the home station ranges used to train the

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<sup>40</sup> United States Special Operations Command Deployment Red Line Policy (August 2, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> According to the policy, a servicemember can volunteer for an exception to the policy's requirement by signing a volunteer statement and having it endorsed by his chain-of-command.

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SEAL force, which is anticipated to reduce the current pace of operations tempo due to deployments for training. However, because these personnel have been required to deploy for most unit training, they have been unable to comply with the policy's requirement.

To determine whether special operations forces are meeting the intent of the policy requires the service components to maintain internal tracking systems with complete, valid, and reliable data on their personnel deployments. However, officials with the Command's Army and Navy components expressed concerns regarding the reliability of the information they use to track the individual deployments of their personnel.

While we did not independently validate the reliability of the data for personnel deployments, an official with the U.S. Army Special Operations Command stated the Army did not have a high level of confidence in the data recorded by the U.S. Army Special Operations Command's units in the Army's system on personnel deployments. Officials told us that they are developing a separate internal management tool in order to fully comply with the deployment policy; however, that tool will not be ready until July 2006.

Naval Special Warfare Command officials told us that comprehensive reporting of personnel tempo information was suspended after the onset of the Global War on Terrorism. The reporting of this information was suspended because the Naval Special Warfare Command could not meet the Navy's personnel tempo standards due to an increase in the pace of deployments in support of ongoing operations. As a result, the Naval Special Warfare Command does not have comprehensive and reliable data on Naval Special Warfare personnel deployments. Officials stated that the Naval Special Warfare Command was in the process of reestablishing personnel tempo reporting with a goal of full reporting for all units by the end of April 2006.

Without consistent and reliable data, the Special Operations Command does not have the information it needs to effectively manage the personnel deployments of special operations forces, which affects the Command's ability to maintain the readiness, retention, and training of special operations forces personnel.

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## Conclusions

The decision by DOD to expand the responsibilities of the Special Operations Command in the Global War on Terrorism has created new

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challenges to determine personnel requirements and acquire, train, and equip a greater number of warfighters to support ongoing military operations. The Congress and DOD have provided resources to enable the Command to augment its personnel. Given the Command's expanded mission, however, it is critical that the Command complete its analyses of personnel requirements and fully determine the number of personnel, who possess the right knowledge and skill sets, for the Command to meet its new role. Without this information, the Command cannot reasonably assure the Secretary of Defense and the Congress that the currently planned growth in the number of personnel for the Command will meet, exceed, or fall short of the requirements necessary to carry out its expanded mission.

The military services and the Special Operations Command have faced human capital challenges in recruiting, training, and retaining a sufficient number of these forces, and many of these challenges continue. In large part, these challenges are attributable to the rigorous selection and training processes set for these personnel. Nonetheless, we believe the Command would be better able to address these challenges if it had a clearer understanding of the progress its service components have made in achieving planned growth, which is clearly linked with appropriate goals and measures. Furthermore, the Command is attempting to meet its growth goals at a time of heightened personnel deployments. However, the Command is managing these deployments without reliable data. Such information would further enable the Command to meet the full range of its missions while maintaining the readiness, retention, and training of its personnel.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command, to

1. establish specific milestones for completing the Command's ongoing analyses of personnel requirements and, once completed, make any needed adjustments to the current plans for personnel increases for the Command's headquarters and related future funding requests;
2. revise the Command's directive for its program to monitor the status of special operations forces to include performance objectives, goals, and measures of progress for achieving planned growth; and enforce all of the directive's reporting requirements; and

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3. clarify the methodology that the Command's service components should use for enforcing the deployment policy, and take steps to ensure that the service components have tracking systems in place that utilize reliable data to meet the requirements of the policy.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with one recommendation and partially concurred with our two remaining recommendations. DOD's comments are included in appendix III. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated into the report, as appropriate.

DOD partially concurred with our recommendation to require the Special Operations Command to establish specific milestones for completing its ongoing analyses of personnel requirements and, once completed, make any needed adjustments to the current plans for personnel increases for the Command's headquarters in related future funding requests. DOD stated that the personnel requirements for the Command's headquarters are being determined by an extensive study scheduled for completion in March 2007. DOD stated that it will monitor the progress and validate the results of this study, which we believe to be important steps. However, as we noted in this report, DOD has already requested funding to substantially increase the number of military and civilian positions at the Command's headquarters beginning in fiscal year 2007, without the benefit of the results from the Command's study of personnel needs. As a result, we would expect DOD to re-evaluate its funding needs upon completion of the Command's study, and adjust its requests accordingly.

DOD concurred with our recommendation to require the Special Operations Command to revise the Command's directive for its program to monitor the status of special operations forces, to include performance objectives, goals, and measures of progress for achieving planned growth, and enforce all of the directive's reporting requirements. DOD stated that the Special Operations Command is updating the directive for its program to monitor the status of special operations forces, and that the department and the Command are continuously developing new tools and metrics to more accurately measure the actual health of special operations forces. DOD further stated that it is difficult to compare personnel data across the services because each of the Command's service components presents data using the metrics of its parent service, adding that it is highly desirable to have each component format its service-derived data in a common database. While we recognize the military services have different metrics, the intent of our recommendation is that the Special Operations

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Command develop a set of reporting metrics that would give the Command the data it needs to monitor progress in meeting growth goals.

Finally, DOD partially concurred with our recommendation to require the Special Operations Command to clarify the methodology that its service components use for enforcing the Command's deployment policy, and take steps to ensure that the service components have tracking systems in place that utilize reliable data to meet the requirements of the policy. DOD stated that the Special Operations Command leadership and all of its service components have implemented the Command's deployment policy, which is in compliance with the department's force deployment rules for Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. In addition, DOD stated that the department will work toward developing a multi-service database and metrics to standardize deployment and other metrics across the joint community to overcome the challenge associated with the fact that each service uses different metrics for calculating deployment time. While we recognize the use of different metrics presents a challenge, our point, as we state in this report, is that the Command's policy is unclear concerning the length of time for which the components must ensure that personnel remain within the deployment guidelines, and whether a servicemember must remain at a home station immediately following one deployment for an equal amount of time prior to a subsequent deployment. As a result, the Command's service components have interpreted the intent of the policy's requirements inconsistently. We continue to believe that additional clarification to the Command's deployment policy is warranted to assist its service components in ensuring that special operations forces personnel remain in compliance with this policy. We also believe that the planned actions to standardize deployment and other metrics should include establishing procedures for recording reliable and relevant data on personnel deployments since, as we reported, officials with two of the Special Operations Command's service components did not have confidence in the reliability of the information that was used to track the individual deployments of their special operations forces personnel. Such data are an important tool to enable the Command to maintain the readiness, retention, and training of special operations forces personnel.

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As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of this report. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Air Force, the Secretary of the Navy, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the Commander, United States Special Operations Command. We will

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make copies available to others upon request. In addition, this report will be made available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>. If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-9619 or [pickups@gao.gov](mailto:pickups@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sharon L. Pickup". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Sharon" on the first line and "L. Pickup" on the second line.

Sharon L. Pickup, Director  
Defense Capabilities and Management

# Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

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To assess the extent to which the Special Operations Command (Command) has identified all of the personnel requirements needed to meet its expanded mission, we identified the Joint Mission Analysis process and the Command's formal manpower studies as the primary processes in which the Command develops its force structure and personnel requirements. To assess the plans to increase the number of special operations forces units and personnel requirements for the Command's headquarters, we conducted site visits and interviewed officials involved with determining personnel requirements with the Special Operations Command, and the Army, Navy, and Air Force service components. We also met with Marine Corps officials to discuss plans for growth in Marine Corps special operations forces. We analyzed the plans for growth in these personnel through fiscal year 2011. We reviewed Department of Defense (DOD) documents identifying the increases in the Special Operations Command's military authorizations and funding since fiscal year 2000 and its plans for personnel growth through fiscal year 2011. We reviewed past reports prepared by GAO that discuss effective strategies for workforce planning. However, we were unable to determine whether all of the Special Operations Command's personnel requirements had been identified because, at the time of our review, the Command had not completed all of its analyses of the personnel requirements needed for its expanded mission responsibilities.

To assess the progress the military services and the Special Operations Command have made since fiscal year 2000 in increasing the number of special operations forces personnel, we discussed the processes used by the military services and DOD to recruit, train, and retain these forces with officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Special Operations Command, and the military services. We focused on these processes for the active components of the military services. To determine what challenges the military services and the Special Operations Command face to meet future growth, we analyzed personnel inventory levels for special operations forces in the active component military services for fiscal years 2000 through 2005. We collected and analyzed data to determine whether the schools that train new special operations personnel are producing enough newly trained personnel in order to meet current authorized personnel levels or planned growth targets. We reviewed relevant Special Operations Command directives and analyzed annual reports prepared by the service components to determine the extent to which the information in these reports met reporting requirements.

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To assess the effect of increased special operations forces deployments, we analyzed deployment data from the Special Operations Command for fiscal years 2000 through 2005. We analyzed the trends in deployments for operations, training, and administrative activities and the trends in deployments by geographic region. We discussed the impact of decreased deployments for training and increased deployments for operations with officials from the military services and the Special Operations Command. We reviewed the Special Operations Command's policy to manage special operations forces personnel deployments and conducted interviews with component command officials to determine their ability to implement and fully comply with this policy. We reviewed available data for inconsistencies. Our assessments of data reliability revealed some concerns which are discussed in this report. Specifically, some of the personnel inventory data provided by the military service headquarters were incomplete. To overcome this challenge, we gathered additional information from the Special Operations Command's service components. In addition, we interviewed officials with the service headquarters and the Special Operations Command's service components who were knowledgeable about the data to discuss the validity of the information provided to us. We concluded the data were sufficiently reliable to answer our objectives. We conducted our review from April 2005 through June 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We interviewed officials and obtained documentation at the following locations:

**Army**

- U.S. Army Headquarters, Washington, D.C.
- U.S. Army Reserve Command, Ft. McPherson, Georgia
- U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina

**Navy**

- Chief of Naval Operations, Arlington, Virginia
- Naval Recruiting Command, Millington, Tennessee
- Naval Special Warfare Command, Coronado, California

**Marine Corps**

- U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

### Air Force

- U.S. Air Force Headquarters, Washington, D.C.
- Air Education and Training Command, Randolph Air Force Base, Texas
- Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida

### Office of the Secretary of Defense

- Office of the Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Washington, D.C.
- Office of the Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness), Washington, D.C.
- Office of the Secretary of Defense (Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict), Washington, D.C.

### Unified Commands

- U.S. European Command, Patch Barracks, Germany
- U.S. Joint Forces Command, Norfolk, Virginia
- U.S. Pacific Command, Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii
- U.S. Special Operations Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida
- U.S. Southern Command, Miami, Florida

# Appendix II: Description of Activities Assigned to the Special Operations Command

Section 167(j) of Title 10, U.S. Code lists 10 activities over which the Special Operations Command exercises authority insofar as they relate to special operations. Table 5 defines these activities.

**Table 5: Description of Activities Assigned to the Special Operations Command**

Activity	Description
Direct Action	Short duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions undertaken to seize, destroy, capture, recover, or inflict damage on designated personnel or materials.
Strategic Reconnaissance <sup>a</sup>	Reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted to obtain or verify, by visual observation or other collection methods, information concerning the capabilities, intentions, and activities of an actual or potential enemy or to secure data concerning the meteorological, hydrographic, or geographic characteristics of a particular area.
Unconventional Warfare	A broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominately conducted by indigenous or surrogate forces that are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source.
Foreign Internal Defense	Participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency.
Civil Affairs	Operations that establish, maintain, influence, or exploit relations between military forces, government and nongovernment civilian organizations and authorities, and the civilian populace in friendly, neutral, or hostile areas of operations in order to facilitate military operations and consolidate and achieve U.S. national objectives.
Psychological Operations	Planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals.
Counterterrorism	Offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, and respond to terrorism.
Humanitarian Assistance	Programs conducted to relieve or reduce the results of natural or man-made disasters or other endemic conditions such as human pain, disease, hunger, or deprivation that might present a serious threat to life or loss of property. This assistance supplements or complements the efforts of host nation civil authorities or agencies that may have the primary responsibility for providing this assistance.
Theater Search and Rescue	Actions performed to recover distressed personnel during wartime or contingency operations.
Other Activities	Specified by the President or the Secretary of Defense.

Source: GAO.

<sup>a</sup>Strategic reconnaissance is commonly referred to as special reconnaissance by DOD.

# Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Defense



SPECIAL OPERATIONS/  
LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2500

JUL 19 2006

Ms. Sharon L. Pickup  
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Pickup,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, GAO-06-812, 'SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be Addressed to Meet Expanded Role,' dated June 14, 2006 (GAO Code 350695). The Department generally concurs with the GAO findings.

SOLIC recognizes the tremendous scope of the original April 2005 GAO engagement subject, "Efforts to Expand the Mission of the U.S. Special Operations Command" and the subsequent rescoping to a more manageable and pertinent review of "Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be Addressed to Meet Expanded Role." DoD comments on the report's recommendations are provided in the enclosure. Suggested technical changes to the report have been provided separately. DoD appreciates the opportunity to comment on the GAO draft report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jill O'Donnell".

Enclosure  
As stated

**GAO DRAFT REPORT - DATED JUNE 14, 2006  
GAO CODE 350695/GAO-06-812**

**"SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be  
Addressed to Meet Expanded Role"**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS  
TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command to establish specific milestones for completing the Command's ongoing analyses of personnel requirements and, once completed, make any needed adjustments to the current plans for personnel increases for the Command's headquarters and related future funding requests. (p. 46/GAO Draft Report)

**DOD RESPONSE:** Partially Concur. USSOCOM is conducting an extensive analysis of headquarters and Component Command manpower. The results will inform the command's Strategic Planning Process (SPP) which determines the warfighting capabilities and capacities required for USSOCOM to accomplish its warfighting mission. The manpower requirement for headquarters manning is being determined by extensive, ongoing manpower study scheduled for completion in March 2007. DoD will monitor the progress and validate the results of this study.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command to revise the Command's directive for its program to monitor the status of special operations forces, to include performance objectives, goals, and measures of progress for achieving planned growth; and enforce all of the directive's reporting requirements. (p. 46/GAO Draft Report)

**DOD RESPONSE:** Concur. USSOCOM is updating its directive 600-7, "Monitorship Program Policy and Procedures," dated 24 April 1995. Further, the Department and USSOCOM is continuously developing and implementing new tools and metrics to more accurately measure the actual health of Special Operations Forces. The challenge remains that each component reports data using the metrics of its parent Service. As a result, there is difficulty in comparing such things as retention and retention incentive eligibility between components when each service determines these factors in a different manner. To have each Component format their Service derived data in a common data base is highly desired.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command to clarify the methodology that the Command's service components should use for enforcing the deployment policy, and ensure that the service components have tracking systems in place that utilize reliable data to meet the

requirements of the policy. (p. 46/GAO Draft Report)

**DOD RESPONSE:** Partially Concur. USSOCOM leadership and all Service Component Commanders have implemented the USSOCOM Red Line Deployment Policy in July 2005. This policy is in compliance with DoD's deployment rules as stated in Undersecretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness Memorandum dated 30 July 2004, "Force Deployment Rules for Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom." DoD policy states, "Dwell time: 1:1 ration of deployed time (in support of any contingency operation) to home station time. Whenever possible, forces are chosen based upon longest dwell time." The challenge remains that each Service uses different metrics for calculating deployment time, making it difficult for USSOCOM, or any Joint headquarters to compare one service against another. The Department will work toward developing a multi-service data base, system and metrics that will rectify and standardize deployment and other readiness metrics across the Joint community.

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# Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

Sharon L. Pickup, (202) 512-9619

## Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, David Moser, Assistant Director; John Pendleton, Assistant Director; Colin Chambers, Jeremy Manion, Stephanie Moriarty, Joseph Rutecki, Christopher Turner, Matthew Ullengren, Cheryl Weissman, and Gerald Winterlin also made key contributions to this report.

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